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SUBJECT: MFA OFFICIAL DISCUSSES PRESIDENT'S VISIT, HIGH-LEVEL
EXCHANGES, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, AMONG OTHER BILATERAL ISSUES

REF: Hanoi 2077

Summary

11. (SBU) On August 22, MFA Americas Department Acting Deputy Director General Pham Van Que reviewed a number of issues of bilateral concern with the DCM. According to Que, the GVN's top two goals for the President's visit are passage of PNTR and removal of Vietnam's CPC designation; the GVN also hopes to settle the new Embassy land issue before the visit. DPM/FM Khiem has not yet formally decided whether to attend UNGA, but may consider a pre-UNGA (and post-Non-Aligned Movement Summit) visit to Washington. National Assembly Vice Chairman Truong Quang Duoc is also mulling over a visit to the United States in September. Que raised the GVN's strong interest in the cases of "terrorists" Ly Tong and Nguyen Huu Chanh; urged the USG to "do something" about the inability of three Vietnamese banks to open representative offices in the United States; noted that a resolution of the De Pham case is in the offing; and, expressed concern about ConGen HCMC officers' consular investigations.

12. (SBU) The DCM expressed strong concern about the comments of a Vietnamese security official in which the "safety" of U.S. Mission officers meeting with dissidents was called into question. He stressed that Embassy officers conduct their necessary business in a professional and open manner. On the subject of religious freedom, the DCM underlined the importance for the GVN to take specific actions over the next six weeks and provide a roadmap on its intentions for the next year. Finally, Que confirmed that prisoners of concern Pham Hong Son and Ma Van Bay will be released in the days ahead. End Summary.

PNTR and CPC Are Vietnam's Top Goals for President's Visit

13. (SBU) The DCM met August 22 with MFA Americas Department Acting Deputy Director General Pham Van Que, at Vietnam's request, to review a number of issues of mutual interest. Que expressed Vietnam's hope that the U.S. Congress will pass PNTR legislation before the President's November visit to Vietnam and also remove Vietnam's Country of Particular Concern (CPC) designation. The GVN hopes that the USG will pursue "high-level engagement" with the Congress on the matter of PNTR, and, to that end, State President Nguyen Minh Triet will write to President Bush welcoming his upcoming visit to Vietnam and "mentioning PNTR." Que, clearly in the drafting chain, asked for our suggestions for subjects to be covered in the letter. The DCM replied that strong commitments to fundamental freedoms and hopes for a stronger, more constructive relationship would be welcomed.

High-Level Vietnamese Visitors

14. (SBU) Que reported that DPM/FM Pham Gia Khiem is scheduled to

attend a "Non-Aligned Movement Summit" in Havana that wraps up in mid-September. Khiem is considering a visit to the United States between the end of that meeting and his possible attendance at the UNGA. Que emphasized that no decisions have been made on travel to either UNGA or the United States, but he asked that Washington be alerted to the possibility Khiem may request meetings. The DCM noted that the September timeframe is extremely busy for U.S. leaders and officials, but promised to convey Que's comments. Que also said that National Assembly Vice Chairman Truong Quang Duoc would like to visit Washington, D.C., and possibly other places, in September. The DCM cautioned that between Congress' election year activities and the UNGA, September may be a difficult month to schedule meetings.

New Embassy Compound

15. (SBU) Que briefly raised ongoing bilateral discussions surrounding acquisition of land for the new Embassy compound, stressing that the GVN's goal is to settle the matter before the President's visit. The DCM acknowledged that progress that has been made to date and agreed on the desirability of the settlement of this long-standing matter.

Vietnamese Banks

16. (SBU) Noting that three Vietnamese banks, including Vietcombank, have been unsuccessful in their attempts to open representative offices in the United States, Que urged the USG to "take this matter seriously." State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) officials would likely raise this matter soon with the Embassy, Que said.

Ly Tong/Nguyen Huu Chanh

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17. (SBU) Que also urged the USG to "do something" regarding the cases of "terrorists" Ly Tong and Nguyen Huu Chanh. "You know our position on these two individuals," Que said.

De Pham

18. (SBU) On the case of De Pham Lifvenborg, an American citizen barred to leave Vietnam while under investigation for possible economic crimes, Que said that she would meet again that day (August 22) with the Ministry of Public Security. (The Embassy has been pressing the GVN to allow Ms. Lifvenborg, who is pregnant, to leave the country for medical treatment that cannot be provided in Vietnam.) The MFA is working with others in the GVN to clear the way, Que said, to allow her to travel to Singapore within the next few days. The DCM expressed appreciation for the GVN's assistance and understanding in this humanitarian matter.

Meetings with Dissidents

19. (SBU) Que noted that EAP DAS Eric John met August 18 with Vietnamese Ambassador Chien and raised the issue of MPS officials' telling an Embassy Hanoi representative that the safety of Mission officers could not be guaranteed should they meet with dissidents. (DAS John was responding to our report of a conversation between MPS officials and the Embassy - reftel - in which MPS Counter Terrorism Department Senior Colonel Nguyen Nhu Huong stated that the safety of diplomats meeting with dissidents "could not be guaranteed. End Note.) Having learned of this exchange via the Vietnam Embassy's cable from Washington reporting the meeting with DAS John, Que requested further details about this exchange. The DCM described conversation with MPS and underscored our surprise and unhappiness over this message. The DCM added that it is because of our wide range of contacts throughout Vietnam that we can credibly report on events in Vietnam. An inability on the Embassy's part to conduct this necessary business would have a severe impact on the bilateral relationship. For example, without the ability to analyze with

certainly developments in Vietnam, the Embassy would lose the capability to report improvements in areas such as human rights and religious freedom. Mission Vietnam representatives conduct their business in a professional and open manner in all their contacts with Vietnamese. Que did not challenge these points, but added that, while the GVN does not forbid Vietnamese from meeting "outsiders," some activists and others are "emboldened" by their meetings with USG officials.

Consular Travel in HCMC

¶10. (SBU) On a somewhat related topic, Que noted that the MFA Consular Department's Deputy Director recently met with Embassy's Consular Chief to remind ConGen HCMC officers to "obey regulations" (septel). Que said that he had heard that some ConGen HCMC officers had behaved "rudely" in dealings with Vietnamese officials. Referring indirectly to the investigative activities of Mission officers, Que suggested that if we suspect fraud in visa or resettlement cases, then perhaps the USG and GVN can pursue "joint investigations." The DCM reiterated that our officers would continue to carry out their duties professionally and appropriately. Furthermore, the USG is concerned not only about fraud in visa and resettlement cases, but also in adoption cases, he added.

Religious Freedom

¶11. (SBU) Following up on Ambassador Hanford's recent discussions in Hanoi, the DCM provided Que with a list of 584 ECVN-affiliated congregations in northern Vietnam that had attempted to register but had their applications rejected or returned. The DCM recalled that Ambassador Hanford had stressed that progress in this area over the next six weeks, along with other steps, would help to demonstrate Vietnam's commitment to enhancing freedom of worship.

Prisoners of Concern

¶12. (SBU) The DCM urged Vietnam to release prisoners of concern Pham Hong Son, Nguyen Vu Binh, Phan Van Ban and Ma Van Bay. Their release would send a strong and positive signal, the DCM said. Que confirmed that Ma Van Bay and Pham Hong Son would be released in the days ahead.

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